



# Glossary of Basketball Term



## 24-second violation

(NBA, WNBA, FIBA) a shot-clock violation.

## 3x3

A formalized version of three-on-three halfcourt basketball created by FIBA in 2007, and currently being heavily promoted by the federation. Originally known as FIBA 33.

## 5x5

A minimum of 5 in all positive stat categories (points, rebounds, assists, steals, and blocks).

## A

### ACB

The top professional league in Spain; often regarded as the second-strongest domestic league in the world, behind the NBA. Initialism for the Spanish *Asociación de Clubes de Baloncesto* ("Association of Basketball Clubs").

### advance step

A step in which the defender's lead foot steps toward their man and the back foot slides forward.

### AIR BALL

An unblocked shot that fails to hit the rim or backboard. Does not reset the shot clock.

### ALLEY HOOP

An offensive play in which a player throws the ball up near the basket to a teammate (or, more rarely, to himself) who jumps, catches the ball in mid air and immediately scores a basket, usually with a slam dunk.

### AND ONE

The free throw awarded to a shooter who is fouled while scoring.

### ASSIST

A pass to a teammate who scores a basket immediately or after one dribble.

## B

### backdoor cut

An offensive play in which a player on the perimeter steps away from the basket, drawing the defender along, then suddenly cuts to the basket behind the defender for a pass. The opposite of a *V cut*.

### ball hog

A player who does not pass the ball

### backboard

The rectangular platform behind the rim in which supports it

### backcourt

(1) The half of the court a team is defending. The opposite of the frontcourt. (2) A team's guards.



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## backcourt violation

(1) Touching the ball in the backcourt after it has entered the frontcourt and was not last touched by the other team. (2) failure to bring the ball from the backcourt into the frontcourt within the allotted time of 8 seconds in the NBA or FIBA (previously 10) and 10 seconds in Men's NCAA. The timing violation does not exist in NCAA Women's basketball.

## back screen

An offensive play in which a player comes from the *low post* to set a screen for a player on the perimeter.

## ball fake

A sudden movement by the player with the ball intended to cause the defender to move in one direction, allowing the passer to pass in another direction. Also called "pass fake."

## ball reversal

Passing of the ball from one side of the court to the other.

## ball screen

An offensive play in which a player sets a screen on the defender guarding the player with the ball.

## ball side

The half of the court (divided lengthwise) that the ball is on. Also called the "strong side." The opposite of the help side.

## banana cut

A wide, curving cut, as opposed to a cut that is a straight line. Also known as a 'C' cut

## bank shot

A shot that hits the backboard before hitting the rim or going through the net.

## baseball pass

Passing the basketball using an overhand throw with one hand similar to a baseball pitch.

## baseline

The line that marks the playing boundary at either end of the court. Also called the "end line."

## baseline out-of-bounds play

The play used to return the ball to the court from outside the baseline along the opponent's basket.

## basket cut

A cut toward the basket.

## BEEF

Balance, Eyes, Elbow, Follow Through

## bench

(1) Substitutes sitting on the sideline, (2) The bench or chairs they sit on.

## benchwarmer

A player who sits on the bench for most if not all of the game.

## big man

A low post player who is typically physically large for a basketball player and generally either a center or power forward.

## blindside screen

A screen set directly behind a defender where the player can't see it.



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## block

(1) A violation in which a defender steps in front of a dribbler but is still moving when they collide. Also called a "blocking foul." (2) To tip or deflect a shooter's shot, altering its flight so the shot misses. (3) The small painted square on the floor next to the basket just outside the lane.

## block out

To maintain better rebounding position than an opposing player by widening your stance and arms and using your body as a barrier. Also called "box out."

## board

A rebound

## bonus

under NCAA and NFHS rules, a team is "in the bonus" when its opponent has seven, eight or nine team fouls in a half and so gains a *one and one* opportunity on each non-shooting foul. The opposing team is "over the limit." See also *double bonus* and *penalty*.

## bounce pass

A pass that bounces once before reaching the receiver.

## box-and-one

A combination defense in which four defenders play zone in a box formation and the fifth defender guards one player man-to-man.

## box out

See block out.

## box set

A formation in which four players align themselves as the four corners of a box. Often used for baseline out-of-bounds plays.

## brick

A bad shot that bounces off the backboard or rim without a chance of going in.

## bricklayer

One who repeatedly shoots bricks.

## bump the cutter

To step in the way of a player who is trying to cut to the ball for a pass.

## buzzer beater

A basket in the final seconds of a game (right before the buzzer sounds) that in itself results in a win or overtime.

## C

## chest pass

The ball is passed from the chest.

## center

One of the three standard player positions. Centers are generally the tallest players on the floor, responsible mainly for scoring, rebounding, and defense near the basket.

## chucker

A player who takes frequent, and often imprudent, shot attempts. The term was popularized by the television series *Seinfeld*.



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## D

### dime

See *drop a dime*.

### dish

An assist.

### disqualifying foul

(FIBA) an especially egregious foul, almost always involving violence or other excessive physical contact, that is punished by immediate ejection. Equivalent to the NBA's *flagrant-2*.

### double bonus

(NCAA and NFHS) when a team accumulates 10 or more fouls in a half, the other team is "in the double bonus", earning two free throws on each subsequent non-shooting foul by the defense. See also *bonus* and *penalty*.

### double-double

Double-digit figures in two positive statistical categories (example: 12 points, 14 rebounds)

### double dribble

(1) To dribble the ball with two hands at the same time (2) To dribble, stop, and then begin to dribble again; Either act results in a loss of possession.

### double nickel

To accumulate 55 points.

### downtown

Well outside the three-point line.

### dribble drive motion

An offense that spreads the players to open up the lane for driving player to make a *layup* or *kick out* for a three pointer.

### dribble

To bounce the ball continuously with one hand. Required in order to take steps with the ball.

### drop a dime

To make an *assist*

### drop step

A post up move where the ballhandler picks up his dribble and at the same time extends a leg back on one side of his defender and then turns toward the basket, using that leg as leverage to get between his defender and the basket.

### dunk

(v) To score by putting the ball directly through the basket with one or both hands. (n) A shot made by dunking.

## E

### end of quarter

when a quarter ends



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## Eurocup

Europe's second-level transnational club competition; the qualifying rounds are operated by FIBA Europe, while the competition proper is operated by [ULEB](#). Analogous to the [UEFA Europa League](#) in [football](#).

## Euroleague

Europe's top transnational club competition, also operated by ULEB. Analogous to the [UEFA Champions League](#) in football.

## EuroBasket

European international tournament, held every two years for both men and [women](#). Analogous to the [UEFA European Football Championship](#) (men) and [UEFA Women's Championship](#).

## F

## fast break

An offensive tactic in which a team attempts to advance the ball and score as quickly as possible, giving the other team no time to defend effectively. Often the result of a steal or blocked shot. See also *secondary break*.

## FIBA

The **International Basketball Federation**, known as FIBA from its French name *Fédération Internationale de Basketball*. An association of national organizations which governs international competitions.

## FIBA 33

The original name of what is now called 3x3.

## field goal

A shot made from anywhere on the court, does not include free throws.

## flagrant foul

An unsportsmanlike foul in which there is no serious attempt to play the ball. The NBA classifies these types of fouls as *flagrant-1* and *flagrant-2*, with the latter resulting in the immediate ejection of the offender. FIBA does not use the term "flagrant foul", instead using *unsportsmanlike foul* and *disqualifying foul* (which roughly correspond to the two NBA subcategories).

## forward

One of the three standard player positions. Forwards are primarily responsible for scoring and rebounding. See [Small forward](#) and [Power forward](#). An individual capable of playing both types of forward is often called a [cornerman](#).

## foul

Violations of the rules other than *floor violations*, generally attempts to gain advantage by physical contact; penalized by a change in possession or free-throw opportunities; see *personal foul*, *technical foul*, *flagrant foul*, *unsportsmanlike foul*, and *disqualifying foul*.

## four-point play

A rare play in which a player is fouled while making a three-point shot and then makes the resulting free throw.

## free throw

An unopposed attempt to score a basket, worth one point, from the free throw line. Generally, two attempts are awarded when the player is fouled in the act of shooting (three attempts are awarded in the case of three point shot), fouled flagrantly, or when the



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opposing team fouls while over the foul limit. For technical fouls, one free throw is awarded under FIBA rules, and two under North American rulesets (NBA, NCAA, NFHS).

## G

### granny shot

An underhand shot taken using both hands, usually as a free throw.

### guard

One of the three standard player positions. Today, guards are typically classified in two broad categories. [Point guards](#) have strong ballhandling and passing skills and are typically used to run the offense. [Shooting guards](#), as the name implies, are generally the team's best shooters, and are very often the leading scorers on their teams. Some players, often referred to as [combo guards](#), combine the features of both.

### gunner

Someone who shoots the ball too many times.

## H

### Hack-a-Shaq

The strategy of intentionally and repeatedly committing a personal foul against a player who shoots free throws poorly. "Shaq" refers to [Shaquille O'Neal](#).

### halfcourt defense

The portion of a team's defensive play conducted with both teams having established positions. See also *transition defense*.

### halfcourt offense

The portion of a team's offensive play conducted with both teams having established positions. See also *transition offense*.

### Halftime

(1) The end of the first half of play. (2) The interval between the two halves.

## I

### in-n-out

A shot that appears to be going in, but instead goes back out.

### index rating

A player rating used by ULEB to determine MVPs in the Euroleague and Eurocup. It is calculated from statistics available in standard ULEB box scores as follows:

**Add** the following statistics: points, assists, rebounds, blocks, steals, fouls drawn, free throws made, 2-point field goals made, 3-point field goals made.

**Subtract** turnovers, own shots blocked, fouls committed, free throw attempts, 2-point field goal attempts, and 3-point field goal attempts.



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## J

### jump shot

A shot taken while jumping

## K

### key

The *free-throw lane* and *free-throw circle* together (originally, the lane was narrower than the circle's diameter, giving the area the appearance of a [skeleton key](#) hole)

### kicking

A violation called when a player intentionally uses his or her foot or leg to contact the ball. Play is stopped and the ball is given to the non-violating team to inbound.

## L

### lane

The *free-throw lane*.

### lay-in

A close-range shot using one hand to tip the ball over the rim

### layup

A close-range shot using one hand to bank the ball off the backboard

## M

### Man-to-man defense

A defense in which each player guards a single opposing player. See also *zone defense*.

### Memphis Attack

Another name for [dribble drive motion](#); the offense was popularized in the early 2000s at the [University of Memphis](#).

### motion offense

Offense created through a series of cuts and screens to create the best possible shot, with most or all offensive players moving simultaneously.

## N





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## NBA

The **National Basketball Association**, the largest professional league in the [United States](#), also with [one team](#) in [Canada](#).

## NCAA

The **National Collegiate Athletic Association**, the primary governing body for intercollegiate sports in the [United States](#). Also used to describe national tournaments operated by this body, especially the [Division I men's](#) and [women's](#) tournaments. An unrelated body [with the same name](#) exists in the [Philippines](#).

## NFHS

The **National Federation of State High School Associations**, the body that sets rules for high school sports in the U.S., including basketball.

## NIT

The **National Invitation Tournament**, a postseason tournament for NCAA Division I men's basketball teams that do not qualify for the NCAA Tournament. Founded in 1938, a year before the NCAA Tournament, it is closely identified with [New York City](#); all games were originally held at [the third Madison Square Garden](#), and to this day the semifinals and final are held at [today's Madison Square Garden](#). In its early years, it was considered more prestigious than the NCAA Tournament, but this changed starting in the 1950s. The tournament has been directly operated by the NCAA since [2006](#).



## offensive foul

A *foul* committed by a member of the team playing offense.

## one-and-one

(NCAA and NFHS) A free-throw attempt which, if made, allows the player a second free-throw attempt. See also *bonus*.

## one trillion

A box score showing one minute played and zero for all other statistics, resulting in a one followed by twelve zeros ó the conventional American rendering of "one trillion."

## outlet pass

A pass thrown by a rebounder to start a *fast break*.

## over-and-back

See *backcourt violation* (1).

## over the back

a foul committed by a player who tries to rebound the ball by pushing, moving or climbing on a player's back who is already in position to rebound the ball.

## overtime

when the score is tied at the end of regulation play, the teams play a five-minute overtime period.



## pack

To roughly hit down a ball that an opposing player has just released for a shot. (See also, *swat*.)





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## paint

the key.

## pass

(v) To throw the ball to a teammate. (n) The act of passing.

## penalty

once a team reaches a set number of team fouls in a playing period, varying by governing body, the fouled team gets free throws instead of possession of the ball. The fouling team is "over the limit." See also *bonus* and *double bonus*.

## perimeter

the area outside the key but well inside the three-point arc.

## pivot

(1) The *pivot center*.

## pivot foot

The foot that must remain touching the floor to avoid *traveling*

## point forward

A forward with strong ballhandling and passing skills who can be called on to direct the team's offense.

## points in the paint

Field goals made in the painted area below the free-throw line

## post up

To go in or near the key, turn so that you are facing away from the basket but towards a teammate who has the ball, and try to establish position to receive a pass.

## prayer

A shot that has very little probability of being made.

## Q

## quadruple-double

Double-digit figures in four positive statistical categories (example: 13 points, 15 rebounds, 11 assists, 14 steals)

## R

## rebound

(v) To obtain the ball after a missed field goal attempt (n) An act of rebounding.

## rejected

To have one's shot blocked.

## rip a C

A motion used while chinning the ball to create space during a pivot between an offensive player and a defensive player. Pivot towards the defender and rips the ball in a C-shape away from the pressure to create a passing lane.

## run

An interval in which one team heavily outscores the other.

## rock

the ball



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## S

### screen, set a screen

(v) To attempt to prevent a defender from guarding a teammate by standing in the defender's way. The screening player must remain stationary; a moving screen is an [offensive foul](#). (n) The tactic of setting a screen. Also called a "pick".

### secondary break

An offensive phase after a fast break is initially stopped, but before the opponent can enter into its set defense.

### set shot

A shot taken without leaving the floor.

### shot clock

A timer designed to increase the pace (and subsequently, the score) by requiring the ball to either touch the rim or enter the basket before the timer expires, resulting in a loss of possession. The time limit is 24 seconds in the NBA, WNBA, and FIBA play; 30 in NCAA women's play; and 35 in NCAA men's play. See also *airball*.

### sixth man (or sixth woman)

A player who does not start, but is generally the first person off the bench, and often has statistics comparable to those of starters.

### stretch 4

A subtype of the [cornerman](#) specifically, a power forward ("4") capable of "stretching" a defense with his or her outside shooting ability.

### swingman

A player capable of playing either shooting guard or small forward.

### swat

To hit a ball that an opposing player just shot off course so that it misses completely. (See also, *pack*.)

### swish

(n) A shot which goes through the net without hitting the backboard or rim. (v) To make a swish.

## T

### technical foul

A foul assessed for unsportsmanlike non-contact behavior and for some procedural violations (for example, having too many players on the floor or calling timeout when none remain). Penalized by loss of possession after a free throw which may be taken by any member of the opposing team. Frequently abbreviated as "technical" or "T."

### three-point field goal

A shot, worth three points, attempted with both feet behind the three-point line.

### three-pointer



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*A three-point field goal*

## trey

*A three-point field goal*

## three-point play

(1) A play in which a shooter is fouled while making a two-point shot and then makes the resulting free throw. See also *and one*. (2) (rarely) When a shooter is fouled while taking but missing a three-point shot and then makes all three free throws.

## toilet bowl

When the ball hits the rim on a certain angle and then circles around it, can go in or out.

## transition defense

The portion of a team's defensive play conducted when the other team has first gained possession and is moving up the court, before both teams have established positions. Includes defense against *fast breaks*. See also *halfcourt defense*.

## transition offense

The portion of a team's offensive play conducted when first obtaining possession from the other team and moving up the court, before both teams have established positions. Includes *fast breaks*. See also *halfcourt offense*.

## travel

To move one's *pivot foot* illegally or to fall to the floor without maintaining a pivot foot (exact rules vary - see [Traveling \(basketball\)](#)) or takes 3 steps. Only 1 or 2 steps are allowed but after you take three steps with not dribbling the ball it is called traveling.

## triangle offense

An offensive strategy with the goal of exchanging three (sometimes all five) positions, creating spacing among players and allowing each one to pass to four teammates.

## triple-double

Double-digit figures in three positive statistical categories (example: 12 points, 14 rebounds, 10 assists)

## turnover

A loss of possession.

## U

## ULEB

A cooperative organization of professional basketball leagues in Europe, this body operates the Euroleague and Eurocup. The name is a [French](#) acronym for "Union of European Leagues of Basketball".

## unsportsmanlike foul

(FIBA) an egregious foul, involving excessive physical contact, fouling with no intention to make a play on the ball, or fouling an opponent on a breakaway from behind. Roughly equivalent to the NBA's [flagrant-1](#).

## Up and down

A travelling violation when the ball carrier jump vertically into the air and does not get rid of it before landing.

## V



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## violation

An infraction of the rules other than a *foul*, such as *traveling* or a *three-second violation*.

## V-cut

A move where you move to the player defending you, then quickly turn and receive the ball. Used to fake the defender.

## W

## WNBA

The **Women's National Basketball Association**, the largest professional basketball league for women in the United States.

## WNIT

The **Women's National Invitation Tournament**, a postseason tournament for NCAA Division I women's basketball teams that do not qualify for the NCAA Tournament. Founded in 1969, the WNIT predates collegiate national championship tournaments for women, but has never been considered the equal of those tournaments. Despite the name, it has no relation to the [men's NIT](#)—it is not operated by the NCAA, and was never under the control of any of the bodies that ran the men's NIT before 2006.

## Z

## zone defense

A defense in which each player is responsible for a section of the court. See also *man-to-man defense*.